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ABSTRACT

In this speech, the chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century describes education as a pathway into the 21st Century. He suggests that if education is to become central in contributing to human progress, policymakers must learn from the experiences of the past 20 years, take the variety of situations into consideration, and attempt to work out some valid principles for discussion and action. Leaders must take advantage of UNESCO's capital of studies and research, and of the experiences of various countries. The Commission examined a number of themes of continuing importance: equality of opportunity, the scientific dimension of education, and lifelong education. The speaker describes three main crises facing the world at the turn of the century: (1) the economic crises; (2) the crisis of the ideology of progress; and (3) a form of moral crisis. Points illustrating the failures of development policies and their links with education include literacy and school attendance. The failures of these policies were due also to aggravating factors such as the population in developing countries, and the crisis in funding. Six lines of inquiry are set forth: (2) education and culture, or how to progress towards self control and an understanding of the world; (2) education and citizenship or how can education lead to free and responsible participation in the life of society; (3) education and social cohesion; (4) education, work, and employment; (5) education and development, or how education can contribute to progress and to its balanced spread throughout the economic and social fabric; and (6) education, research, and science. (DK)

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Commission internationale sur l'éducation pour le vingt et unième siècle

International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century

SPEECH OF MR JACQUES DELORS
(AT THE 140TH EXECUTIVE BOARD)

UNESCO, Paris

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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address given by
Mr Jacques Delors
Chairman
of the International Commission on Education and Learning
for the Twenty-First Century
to the 140th session of the Executive Board

EDUCATION AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The scale of the task facing the International Commission on Education and Learning for the Twenty-First Century is, I think, bound up first of all with the fact that there are so many different situations. The following few remarks necessarily reduce the differences to more general terms, and it will be important, so far as its method of work is concerned, for the Commission to be able to call on experts from different countries and for there to be clear knowledge of the experience of those countries. The scale of the task is, however, also linked to the inability to see into the future.

It is not the first time that I have had to conduct future-oriented work. Some time ago, I re-read the papers that we produced at the Commissariat général du plan in France between 1960 and 1965, and I occasionally shuddered when I compared the reality of today with the predictions that we thought we had to make. We must nevertheless remain optimistic all the same and, like Gaston Berger, hold to the view that looking at the future already amounts to changing it.

Education as a pathway into the twenty-first century

I quote a sentence from the terms of reference assigned to this new Commission as the point of departure for this dialogue, which I thank the Executive Board for organizing: 'How can education play a dynamic and constructive role in preparing individuals and societies for the twenty-first century?', and this comes some 20 years after another Commission, chaired by Mr Edgar Faure, published a still topical report under the significant title: 'Learning to Be'. In the meantime, education systems have developed but have not escaped criticism and there is abundant literature on the subject. Some authors (all the more numerous for not being specialists in education) hold the view that education systems - and I am not talking about education as such - are a sort of explanatory factor of, and sometimes the scapegoat for, certain glaring failures, mainly the rise in unemployment in the industrialized countries, and development failures in the countries of the South. (I will for convenience's sake use these concepts of North and South without closing my eyes to the fact that they do not fully reflect the present situation and that they may even sometimes shock some people.)

This view of education systems is generally unfair and yet ... Yet the Director-General of UNESCO felt that the time had come not only to learn lessons from experience but also in a way to rehabilitate education as a kind of essential pathway into the new century. If we want education to be central among the factors contributing to human progress, we must learn from the experiences of the past 20 years, take the variety of situations into consideration and attempt to work out some valid principles for discussion and action. At the same time, we must take full advantage of UNESCO's capital of studies and research, and also of the experience of the various countries, and this calls for working methods flexible enough for us to benefit from all possible contributions.

At this preliminary stage when it is rather a matter of asking questions without already having the answers, it is not irrelevant to mention some of the dominant features of the report 'Learning to Be'. To my mind, the report, which the Director-General has placed in its context of the student demonstrations of the 1960s and the crisis of authority in its accepted sense, focused on the development of the person and, from that point of view, comes close to the instinctive feelings of Mr Mayor.

Mr Edgar Faure and the authors of the report wrote, quite simply: 'Uniting *Homo Sapiens* and *Homo Faber* is not enough; such a man must also feel in harmony with himself and others: *Homo Concors*'. That principle, that ideal is still valid. At the same time, the authors of the report examined the foundations of a number of themes which have also not lost any of their topicality, namely, equality of opportunity, because it is among the essential aims of education policies; the scientific dimension of education, perhaps in a somewhat different form from the one I will propose in a moment, in the sense of the assimilation of technological progress by each person; and lastly, lifelong education - proposed at the very same time as I was getting a law on continuing training passed in France. The report also spoke in favour of education throughout life, in space and time, a formula that I would translate by another aim, 'Everyone is to be educator and learner alternately throughout their life'.

Education and the crises of today's world

To show you the questions that we are pondering, I should like to suggest that our thoughts should be placed in the context of the three main crises of today's world and then suggest to you some lines of inquiry and some questions.

Three current crises can, I think, within the time allotted to us, permit joint discussion. These are the economic crisis, the crisis of the ideology of progress and a certain form of moral crisis, the word moral being taken in its general sense and not simply in its religious sense.

To start with the economic crisis, we are, of course, all influenced by the current situation, which is worrying in many respects, but let us look beyond this situation and dwell for a moment on the ills of the societies of the North and the impasses facing the societies of the South - even if, here again, this observation is too general.

There are, first of all, the discussions about international co-operation in an increasingly interdependent world - some people have used the apt expression 'global village'. These discussions concern the education and behaviour of all; is international co-operation of a calibre sufficient to meet the demands posed by global interdependence?

There is also unemployment, whose current very high levels are prompting a re-examination of the role of work in society and leading some sociologists to cease to regard it as holding the centre-stage position it held only 20 years ago as the context within which social issues arise.

Then there is the development model. You will remember Ms Brundtland's report to the United Nations on sustainable growth, entitled "Our common future". Is the model of production growth that marked the years 1950 to 1980 still valid? Should we not think about a development model that makes smaller demands on human time and shows greater respect for the capital of natural resources? These are some of the questions that arise, and one may well wonder whether education and training - which may be fused in the single English word 'learning' - whether education and training really do provide today's men and women, the men and women who exercise responsibility, with concepts, tools, analyses and projects enabling them to reply.

As for the failures of development policies and their links with education, UNESCO provides us with a mine of information in its "World Education Report 1991". I should like to start by pointing out, in connection with the South, that there have been some very successful efforts there in respect both of development and of education. I therefore realize that, by its global nature, my verdict is likely to irritate some and to be too general. However, let us make a more detailed survey of these points all the same.

First of all, literacy which was already central to the Edgar Faure report. It is very well defined in the World Education Report: 'A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life'; it seems to me that this undoubtedly gives us a yardstick for measuring the enormous gap that remains to be filled for every man and every woman to attain that minimum.

Literacy statistics - which do not, of course, do not correspond to that definition - reveal that there are still nearly one billion illiterates today in the world - 948 million in 1990 - and that the literacy rate is only 47 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, a continent forgotten by development efforts. Many more examples could be given. I see here a fundamental problem for an organization like UNESCO, since education means equality of opportunity and solidarity, which is a value essential to an interdependent world if that world is to survive without deep-seated crises and tragic conflicts.

The next point is school attendance. There has been a great deal of progress here, but if we look at global figures we note that in 1990 the figure for children not attending school in the developing countries was still 130 million in the 6-11 age-group and nearly 280 million in the 12-17 age-group. These figures are enormous and they are not restated often enough. When we discuss the North-South dialogue in international organizations we talk about assistance, we talk about trade, but we do not lay sufficient emphasis on the fact that 'the human resource' - which is essential, since there are no riches without men and women -is not exploited, is not used and is not developed as it should be.

The failures of these policies, of course, were due also to aggravating factors - the population explosion that has been responsible for the fact that nearly seven out of eight children under 15 live in developing countries, and the effects of the crisis on funding, since when these countries have to cope with a stabilization programme proposed by the International Monetary Fund the first expenses that are sacrificed are often, alas, educational expenses. There is a figure of the utmost importance here as well: the rich countries devote

0.35 per cent of their gross national product to development aid; the share of education in this development aid is only 0.03 per cent!

Here then is a situation that calls out for our attention and which, I must stress, continues to be a central concern if we are to reactivate North-South relations, the quality and results of which have in my view tended to be in decline for the past ten years or so.

We must therefore take up these challenges, the first of which is that, paradoxically, there is both under-attendance, in respect of the school-age population, and over-attendance in view, firstly, of the costs requiring public funding and, secondly, of the capacity of certain countries, in their present economic situation, to absorb school-leavers. In other words, many countries, in a sort of qualifications syndrome, have neglected the most important types of training and also the resources that the village, the family and community life could offer to allow all individuals to fulfil their potential within the environment to which they belong.

Therefore, if training is to be adapted to the needs of the economy - and this is a dominant theme - the basic pre-conditions for this must first be met - the environment, the participation of the family, of the village, of communities, in this effort - which is truly a promotional effort, to ensure access by all to consciousness of himself or herself, to consciousness of his or her possibilities, to the feeling that one is participating.

We must also tackle the crisis in the ideology of progress, and here I will be much briefer. Since the Enlightenment, human progress has been assimilated to our increasing ability to control the natural world. In this way, human discoveries opened up previously undreamt of vistas which were believed to be in the general interest, in the interest of us all. But today, without taking sides on the substance of the issue, we are forced to admit that this scientific Utopia is being challenged. To what extent? How far should it be challenged? That is the question, for, as you know, the ethics of science is confronting us with dilemmas, doubt is being cast on the idea of pure economic efficiency. This question is philosophical, admittedly, but at the same time practical and political, for once the experts have been consulted, the politicians must make their decisions. At what point should we halt the advance of human action to mould human beings? Just how far can nature be exploited within the context of a reasonable but essentially ecological approach to our problems?

Lastly and most importantly, there is a moral crisis. With the weakening of the great value systems which have guided societies for so long and which have slowly altered over the decades, with the muddled aspirations of our contemporaries and with the internationalization of problems which should be leading us to some form of world citizenship, all the international organizations are called upon to act. In two years' time, the United Nations will be celebrating is fiftieth anniversary, and thought is already being given to what its future role might be. The debate on the right of interference provides an illustration of this point. The same is true of UNESCO, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and many other organizations. No doubt other ideologies will emerge, for we cannot be satisfied with the dullness of the present period and with the rejection of ideologies which, we must admit, goes with a kind of weakness, a sort of awareness that we do not understand the world and that we are all retreating into our separate corners. Meanwhile, various forms of fundamentalism beckon to all who have missed out on development, quite apart from any theological or metaphysical considerations.

It seems to me that UNESCO has an essential role to play in tackling this moral crisis, even if there are no miracle cures, and even if the forms of human alienation are constantly

renewed, as the philosopher tells us. However, it seems to me, after many conversations with your Director-General, that he tends to believe this is not inevitable and that he wants us to be reasonably optimistic and highly goal-oriented in our work. These are necessary virtues today, for education can and must contribute not only to the advancement of the individual, as was said in the Faure Report, but also to the emergence of common values, which the recent progress of democracy in the world entitles us to hope for, and also to a better understanding of others and the world in which we live. Then, and only then, will the phrase 'global village' be truly meaningful.

Six lines of inquiry

Notwithstanding the over-simplification, this is, I think, the bottom line which should motivate us and which I think I am right in saying is behind UNESCO's approach in its fields of competence and its questionings.

On that basis I have tried to pinpoint a few lines of inquiry which will be re-examined with the other members of the Commission and with the experts, taking account - I repeat - of the diversity of situations and turning to advantage whatever has been of value and is at variance with my unduly general analysis.

I believe that we should initiate various lines of inquiry in order to gain a better understanding of the connection between education and culture (but culture seen as a factor in greater self-knowledge and knowledge of others, a 'learning to be', as it has been called); between education and citizenship and, more generally, the sense of belonging (so that our contemporaries and those who come after us do not feel isolated in this world with all its breathtaking developments, which they see on their television screens); between education and social cohesion (which is a shadow of its former self 50 years ago in the countries of both North and South); and, then, of course, the connection between education, training, work and employment; the connection with development; and, lastly, the essential role which education must play in the progress of research.

Firstly, education and culture, or how to progress towards self-control and an understanding of the world. Some radical systems propose that each of us must make our own way, as we see fit, under our own steam and with our own expectations, and there are even market theories which encompass these aspects of existence. The image is a kind of neo-Rousseauesque vision of self-advancement and development. But I would say that, on the contrary, culture must be both dialectical and collective: dialectical between each individual and the community. Culture plunges its roots deep into the past, allowing each country and each ethnic group to retain its own personality, strengthened by that past which is like a rock beneath us, even if permanence must be blended with change: that is the condition for the success of development policies, inasmuch as care must be taken not to uproot people completely. Some of the failures of development are linked to the fact that well-educated, perfectly capable individuals have been placed in circumstances where they have lost their roots and are unable to offer the rest of humanity all that they have brought with them in their history, their individuality and their genes.

Education and citizenship, or how can education lead to free and responsible participation in the life of society? Clearly, this question does not take the same form in all political systems. Nevertheless, we must ponder the connections between education, freedom and equality, a theme which challenges all forms of particularism and which also, through the great image of the global village, raises the question whether we and our children can live and

agree to live in a multi-ethnic environment, in a pluralist community, pluralist in terms of religious beliefs and pluralist in terms of race, even if the problem is not just one of emigration and racial co-existence. This question is of worldwide significance, as the internationalization of problems will sooner or later require the internationalization of behaviour and global awareness. Thus, perhaps, we may more easily understand and help with the difficult processes involved in the transition to democracy.

Education and social cohesion: this is undoubtedly a very traditional theme, but it is one that always calls for our attention, as social cohesion, I repeat, is today under threat. It is under threat in the rich countries, where 20 to 30 per cent of the population is marginalized; it is under threat when the question of work in society is raised (is it still the factor of socialization and social integration that it used to be?). It is under threat in the developing countries, caught between an élite whose task it is to govern those countries and the mass of the people who quite rightly live in accordance with their traditions and who cannot follow or come to terms with the contradictions of development, or what we call the contradictions between tradition and modernity.

The fourth line of inquiry is education, work and employment. This is the field where the literature is most abundant and concerning which there is even a tendency in some of our countries, including mine, to consider education as being too 'academic' and insufficiently job-oriented. I will tell you quite candidly that I, for one, am suspicious of this theory, and when it is maintained in my country that the education system is the principal cause of unemployment, I do not believe it. What I do know, however, is that, if the conditions are right, every individual should be able to acquire a measure of knowledge and know-how enabling him or her to be actively involved in the economy and the labour market. There is in fact a link between knowledge and know-how. What good is it to possess superb know-how if your basic knowledge does not make it possible for you to adapt to a rapidly changing world, to new forms of production or to a new occupation? Hence knowledge must be brought back into its own; and if there have to be short courses, they must not disregard knowledge, since to do so would be to some extent to re-establish a two-speed education system, with those on the one side who are considered as gifted and as having the aptitude to go on to study at the highest level, and those on the other receiving just the bare minimum. I believe that this way of looking at things only makes it more difficult for the latter to play a full part in society.

To talk about education and development is to ask how education can contribute not only to progress but also to its balanced spread throughout the economic and social fabric. While not wishing to emphasize the point, I feel this to be a broader concept of development which needs to be adapted to the conditions of various societies. In societies which are still traditional, for example, where the clash between tradition and modernity is strong, I believe that speaking about education also means envisaging ways of using education systems to promote the development of villages and groups and to restore to the idea of collective development every opportunity for it to prove itself. If this is not done, the danger of social dichotomy would be such that economic failure would lie at the end of the road.

The last line of inquiry I wish to propose is education, research and science. I shall simply say that every individual should of course be given the opportunity to assimilate that portion of technological progress which is relevant to his or her job and everyday life, but that it should never be forgotten that the education system is also the foundation for the training of the scientific communities who will be responsible for human progress and the promotion of human self-knowledge and the knowledge of nature and of all else that impinges on human

life. This is why I think that this aspect of education must not be overlooked, despite the formidable ethical problems which scientific progress raises.

Transverse problems

These then are the six lines of inquiry which I am putting forward for you to think about, and if they obtain the approval of the Executive Board, I shall propose them to the other members of the Commission. But if its work is to have an even more practical impact and make it possible to pass from discussion and proposals to actual education policies, three problems will also have to be tackled which I would describe as transverse problems.

The first is the effect of the modern communication media on contemporary education systems. In what ways are these media constructive and able to help and enable us to make best use of our resources? In what ways do they twist reality and to what extent has it become a must for teachers, beginning at the pre-primary and primary-school levels, to adapt their lessons to take account of television programmes?

The second transverse problem is the future of the teaching profession -the future of those teachers who are often the target of criticism, which does not help matters and provides no solution, for people cannot change unless they are given self-confidence and unless the value of their profession is acknowledged. And the profession of teacher is certainly the finest in the world.

The third and last transverse problem concerns the systems to be set up and the funds that have to be found.

These, I feel, are a few vertical and horizontal lines of inquiry. To put it succinctly, the questions we are raising are enormous and I am aware of the magnitude of the task. How are we to help the individual man and woman to find the path of wisdom, meaning the path of personal responsibility and self-control? How can we give people the ability to know themselves and to behave in a way that is both self-reliant and mindful of others, at a time when various types of intolerance are on the increase in the form of fundamentalist movements and perverse types of nationalism? How are we to give people the means to play a part in the collective adventure in which, willy nilly, they are involved, and in the historical process of which they are a part? How can we make everyone the agents of a more harmonious, more caring form of social and economic development?

I know, of course, that education cannot do everything; but it is the depository of a treasure - the treasure of knowledge about itself which humanity has accumulated over the centuries and the best of which must be passed on to future generations. This, in any event, is something that makes it possible to restore the sound notion of authority, for the authority of teachers resides in the fact that they are the ones who know and who can delve into this treasure to enable everyone to profit from the experience of past generations. Out of this comes the Utopia of a living democracy, of responsibility accepted and assumed and of mutual understanding among communities - the lack of which is undoubtedly at the root of the troubles threatening the world order today - where all are made to feel that they belong and the harmful forms of individualism are discouraged. Such is the very tenuous thread which I think could guide our discussions.

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